LODI HISTORICAL SOCIETY
Incorporated October 20, 1988

LODI HISTORIAN

VOLUME 2, NUMBER 3 FALL 1991

Lodi's "Golden Age" of Opera

by Maurice Hill

During the remarkable years of the early 1900's, opera reached the height of its glory at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York City. So many magnificent voices of world famous singers appeared at this famous institution of song that this era is remembered as "The Golden Age of Opera."

During this same period, Lodi, too had its own golden theatrical age, an age lasting for the better part of a decade.

Chiefly responsible for the introduction of this resplendent age in Lodi's theatrical history was Charles L. Van Buskirk. It was his farseeing vision which made possible and provided a suitable and permanent place where the best of out-of-town, as well as local, talent could appear before the Lodi public.

Charles Lener Van Buskirk was born at Woodstock, New Brunswick, September 29, 1845. His father was Lener Van Buskirk, a native of Nova Scotia and his mother was Susan Towel Van Buskirk, a native of Maine.

By the time Charles was eight years old he became an orphan. He went to live with his mother's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Elisha Towle, at Steven's Point, Wisconsin. He stayed with his grandparents until he was 16, at which time he began to earn his own living. What schooling he had came before he was eight years old.

Mr. Van Buskirk first worked for several years in the saw milling industry in Wisconsin thereby laying the foundation for his later business career. In 1865, at the age of 20, he and his brother George were partners in a lumber industry in Wisconsin under the name of Van Buskirk Brothers. This firm continued until 1895. In 1893 the Van Buskirk brothers bought timber land in Calaveras and Amador counties in California. From this time on, Charles Van Buskirk was connected with the lumber industry.

Mr. Van Buskirk bought out his brother's interest in the business in 1902 and, later, he took in Brown Brothers Lumber Company of Rhinelander, Wisconsin, as partners.

The Lodi Opera House as it appeared soon after construction.

Mr. Van Buskirk sold three-fourths of his holdings to them.

Charles Van Buskirk made Lodi his home in 1893. He was a public-spirited and highly regarded citizen. He was a Republican and was a member and trustee of the Lodi Congregational Church.

Mr. Van Buskirk was married to Miss Angie B. Crocker on July 1, 1885. She was a native of Wausaw, Wisconsin. Mr. and Mrs. Van Buskirk were the parents of two sons, Charles Ray and Earle L. Van Buskirk.

When Mr. Van Buskirk came to Lodi in 1893, he recognized the possibilities of its growth and business importance. Therefore, he bought 13 corner lots in the city — five of which were in the main business section of town. These included the locations of the Van Buskirk building, the Davis building, the telephone building, the Sentinel building and the School Street garage.

One of Mr. Van Buskirk's most important enterprises was the erection of the Lodi Opera House on the southeast corner of Pine and School streets. The structure was 64'x95' and was comprised of two stories and a basement. The exterior was faced with pressed brick.

The upper floor was the location for the Opera House while the lower floor was made available for business purposes. The Opera House had a seating capacity of 900 and the building cost was said to be in the neighborhood of $32,000.

Charles Van Buskirk was active in obtaining Lodi's first public library and, subsequently, in helping to secure the Carnegie Library for the city. His interests were wide, extending to schools, charitable organizations, paving of streets, the building of churches, etc. He was a foe to vice and intemperance.

When Mr. Van Buskirk passed away on October 7, 1920, Lodi lost one of its most progressive citizens. His influence was considerable in the civic, social and moral uplift of the community. He was a man not soon to be forgotten.

On January 7, 1905, the Lodi Sentinel appeared with the news that the new Opera House would open on January 26 with the comic opera, "King Dodo."

Arrangements at this time were being concluded by C.L. Van Buskirk and Fred H. Lee, manager of the Opera House, for the road show of the Tivoli Opera House in San Francisco to appear in the forementioned opera.

"King Dodo is one of the best comic operas ever staged, but is now closing a successful run of many weeks at the Tivoli Opera House. The company will soon start on its annual tour in order to make way for grand opera.

"Lodi is fortunate in being able to secure such a magnificent company.

"It is safe to predict that the Opera House will be crowded on the opening night and the audience cannot help being pleased with this high class play."

Fortunately, a program of the first show in Lodi's new Opera House has been preserved and is reproduced on page 47 of this publication.

A writer of the Lodi Sentinel reviewed the gala performance as follows: "There is no king but Dodo, so thought the audience numbering 650 of northern San Joaquin's finest at the Lodi Opera House, Thursday evening.

"It was the grand opening of that institution, and the Tivoli Opera company of San Francisco under direction of Mr. Joseph Muller in the comic opera, "King Dodo" was the attraction. This company came highly recommended, and the unanimous verdict of the delighted audience was to the effect that it fulfilled all anticipations.

"There were few vacant seats in the house when the great orchestra leader, Paul Steindorff, took his seat at the new thousand dollar baby grand piano, the property of the new play house. When seen in San Francisco, this celebrated conductor is usually in action with a baton, but Thursday night he proved that he can perform as well as direct. The balance of the orchestra members were in their places and promptly at 8:15 the opening overture was played.

"The curtain raised on a scene of beauty, enlivened by spirited song and motion from the chorus, and the expectant audience realized that the long anticipated play had commenced...

"Frequently, plays which are carried into the interior are 'cut' but this is a notable exception. The people get fully two and a half hours of solid enjoyment and the actors are at their best...

"And now that Lodi has a new Opera House and will be visited by theatrical companies it will be well for the public to take a few matters into serious consideration.

"First — the plays must be patronized. Otherwise the town will gain the reputation of being a 'frost' and good companies will avoid it.

"Second — the audience should be liberal with its applause; not thestamping and whistling kind, but a generous hearty clapping of hands. Actors cannot be at their best unless they plainly see that the audience is appreciating and enjoying their efforts.

"Messrs. Van Buskirk and Lee are worthy of commendation for the good beginning they have made.

"It is no small undertaking to play an attraction like the one with which they introduced the new house to the public, and its signal success should mark the beginning of a brilliant career. They will surely do their part, and it is up to the people to show a proper appreciation."

On the evening of February 10, 1905, a play titled "A Husband in Clover" was produced at the Lodi Opera House by the drama department of the Lodi High School.

Those appearing in the two playlets, "A Husband in Clover" and "At the Postern Gate" were: Evert Mills, Jettora Watkins, Perry Howe, Edwin Grant, Edith Bowling, Myrtle McClung and Ella Corbin. Between the two plays, Mrs. Fred (May) Lee sung "Beautiful Home of Paradise."

William Mitchell's Old Virginia Minstrels were to have appeared at the Opera House on July 30-31, 1905. This show was comprised of 25 persons including its own band and orchestra.

There had been no show at the theatre for some time so a crowd was expected. In addition public interest had been whetted by the advertised parades and out-of-door concerts to be given each day at noon. However, the anticipated performances never took place — the reason for which is shown in the following write-up in the local newspaper:

"Why minstrel show did not appear — could not secure fitting accommodations. Bible editor of the Sentinel writes the story:

"And it came to pass that a Negro minstrel show was to perform in Lodi, and great was the joy of the residents thereof, for verily and of a truth, entertainments have been rare since the advent of the summer when the green grassy grass grows all around and our folks are busy with the fruit.

"And, even as the sons of Ham

GRAND OPENING

Lodi Opera House

THURSDAY EVENING, JANUARY 26, 1905.

In Pixley and Luders' Comic Opera Success

"KING DODO"

Tivoli Opera Company

Direction.....JOSEPH MULLER

C. L. VAN BUSKIRK, Proprietor. FRED H. LEE, Manager.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

King Dodo I., a ruler by Divine right only..... Willard Simms
Pedro, a court chamberlain ..... Thos. H. Persse
Dr. Fizz, a court physician ..... Teddy Webb
Mudge, a court historian ..... William Schuster
Sancho, an innkeeper ..... Joseph Fogarty
Bonilla, Prime Minister to Queen Lili .....William Schuster
Lo Basswood, a sign of better times ..... Joseph Fogarty
Lopez .....
Diego ..... } Citizens { .....Karl Formes
Unio ..... } { .....Addison Braidwood
Jose ..... } { .....Vladimir Adler
{ .....Melville Stoltz
Piola, a soldier of fortune ..... Edith Mason
Angela, the King's ward, betrothed to Piola ..... Dora de Felippe
Queen Lili, ruler of the Spoopjus ..... Bessie Tannehill
Annette, daughter of Sancho ..... Esther King
Heralds ..... { Dolly Wray
{ Irene Duvall

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT I—Exterior of King Dodo's Palace in Dodo Land.

ACT II—Gardens fronting Queen Lili's Palace in Spoopju Land.

ACT III—The Spoopju Spring.

TIME—The Present PLACES—Dodo and Spoopju Lands

Produced under the General Direction of W. H. Leahy.

Under the Musical Direction of Paul Steindorff

Under the Stage Management of Ferris Hartman

Ladies are kindly requested to remove their hats.

STORY OF "KING DODO"

The story of "King Dodo" is founded upon the legend which is as old as the hills—the search of mankind after everlasting youth. King Dodo is the ruler of all the Dodos. He has grown old and decrepit. His philosophy has taught him that old age is only a disease, which can be cured like other diseases. Dr. Fizz, his court physician and a medical charlatan, has imposed upon the King's credulity for many years. Suddenly the King decides that his physician must cure him of old age, or lose his head. He gives him one year in which to accomplish the cure. Dr. Fizz begins to work. He experiments on everything in sight but a man, with varying results.

When his magic potion is ready for the King, he invites the monarch to partake of it. The wily King decides to test the so-called wonderful power of the youth-restoring potion upon an ordinary man before trying it on himself. To that end Mudge, the superannuated court historian, is called into service. He is given the potion and drinks heartily of it. Instantly its magic effect is apparent. The old man acts like a boy, scampers about, makes love to the pretty girls and is a evidently youthful again. When the King sees this he is overjoyed and asks for the potion. Mudge prances off the stage, and just as the King is about to drink there is the sound of a terrific explosion. It is Mudge blown to pieces by the effect of the magic restorer. All that remains of him is contained in a few articles of clothing and the feather in his hat which drop from the sky. The King is plunged again into sorrow.

At this point Piola, a soldier of fortune, who loves Angela, the King's ward, steps forward and offers to lead Dodo to the Fountain of Youth if he will agree to bestow Angela upon him, if he is successful. Piola agrees to forfeit his head if he fails. The King agrees to the proposition and they set out for Spoopju Land, ruled over by Queen Lili, in whose domain exists the magic spring of youth. When they arrive there the Queen sees King Dodo and falls in love with him. She does not want him to become young again, because she loves him as he is, and she tries to persuade him to remain so.

But Dodo is determined to be young again. He plunges into the spring, drinks of its magical waters and is instantly restored to youth and comliness.

Queen Lili is disconsolate at the change. Bonilla, her prime minister, himself enamored of the Queen, plots to throw the King into the spring, hoping that he will drown and thus rid himself of his successful rival in the Queen's love. He succeeds, inasmuch as he gets Dodo into the spring. But the waters which make the old young, also make the young old. Dodo does not drown, but is changed back to old age again. The Queen is delighted and Bonilla's purpose is defeated. This last transition incorporates peace of mind in the King's brain. He decides to remain old, marry Queen Lili and let Dame Nature take her course. Piola is rewarded by the hand of the lovely Angela; Pedro, the court chamberlain, weds Annette, and everything ends happily, as it should do.

MUSICAL NUMBERS

—ACT I—

Overture ..... Orchestra
Opening Chorus—"Merrily Cheerily"..... Chorus
Solo and Chorus—"Joy Rules the Day"..... Annette
Solo and Chorus—"Look in the Book and See"..... Mudge
Solo and Chorus—""I'll Do or Die"..... Piola
Solo and Chorus—"The Eminent Dr. Fizz"..... Dr. Fizz
Chorus—"On This Festal Day"
Solo and Chorus—"A Jolly Old Potentate"..... King Dodo
Solo—"Longing" ..... Pedro
Duett—"Two Hearts Made One"..... Piola and Angela
Quartette—"The Miller's Cats.....Piola, Angela, Annette, Pedro
Solo and Chorus—"Old Father Time"..... Piola
Solo and Chorus—"Let's Away"..... Piola
Finale—"Behold the Call to Arms"

—ACT II—

Opening Chorus—"Gently the Breezes of Summer"
Solo and Chorus—"For Love I Live Alone"..... Queen Lili
Solo and Chorus—"Diana"..... Angela
Duett—"I'll Shut My Eyes".....Annette and Pedro
Solo and Chorus—"Claim Thou Thine Own" ..... Queen Lili
Amazon March ..... Chorus
Solo and Chorus—"The Lad Who Leads" ..... Piola
Duett and Chorus—"The Tale of a Bumble Bee.....King Dodo and Annette
Chorus—"Let Music Sound"
Ensemble and Finale

—ACT III—

Opening Chorus—"We Are Conspirators"..... Male Chorus
Serenade .....Piola and Chorus
Solo—"Chicken Song" ..... King Dodo
Ensemble and Finale

An interesting illustrated address will be given in this house on next Saturday evening by Mr. Colvin B. Brown under the auspices of the Stockton Chamber of Commerce. No admittance will be charged. All are invited to attend. Mr. Brown was San Joaquin county's representative at St. Louis.

LODI SENTINEL PRINT

to play upon the banjo and sing the songs of the south, and even as they were to parade the thoroughfares and make music from brass horn and fife, it transpired not.

"And the multitudes were loath to be disappointed in this merriment for they had banked much thereon. And it was hard to bear.

"And it transpired that in as much as the white hotel keeper refused to harbor beneath his roof the sons of Ham and even as the cook thereof was loath to feed the sons of Ham, great was the indignation of the sons of Ham, for were they not born equal and human?

"And it came to pass that the Negro minstrels turned up their noses in disgust and refused to show in Lodi town wending their ways to places wherein equal rights were shown to all."

Frankie Earle Merrill was billed to appear at the local Opera House on the evening of August 29, 1905. From a newspaper at the time:

"This gifted lady belongs to the early family of Swiss bell ringers and she is a noted elocutionist and impersonator, a graduate of the Philadelphia School of Oratory and a teacher of elocution for two years at Vassar College. Among her successful impersonations may be mentioned T. Dewitt Talmadge, Susan B. Anthony, Belva Lockwood, John A. Logan, Sarah Bernhardt, Widow Bedott, Benjamin F. Butler, Aunt Samantha and Queen Victoria.

"Ice cream and cake will be served by the ladies, auspices of the Congregational Church — tickets 25¢ and 35¢."

One of the big nights at the Lodi Opera House took place on the evenings of September 22 and 23, 1905 when "The Military Girl", an operatic extravaganza, in two acts, had the stage and was greeted by a large audience. "To say that the show was a grand success does not come near giving the participants credit due them, and too much praise cannot be extended to Mr. Mellor of Carlyle & Mellor who brought the performance to such a state of excellence.

"The curtain raised on Camp Kitchner and from the opening chorus to the grand finale there was not a dull moment. Never in the history of Lodi has there been so many fine voices brought together, and the stage acting, and evolutions would have been a credit to many first class companies.

"Miss Jettora Watkins took the part of General with an air of command that was delightful to witness, and sustained the part with grace and dignity that was refreshing. Her dialogue with the Sergeant was given with a perfect enunciation, and her song "Kiss Me Goodbye" was one of the hits of the evening.

"Miss Neva McNeil as the Captain was pretty and petite, and her rendition of "Tenting Tonight" was a treat. The applause which she received goes to show that the old folk songs have as warm a place in the hearts of the public as they had years ago, especially when rendered as was the song last night.

"Mr. Mellor as Sergeant Malone sang "Piff, Paff, Pauff," with the awkward squad, and the drilling of the bunch of recruits was ludicrous to the extreme and kept the house in roars of laughter.

"Mr. Carlyle, as the Dutch Musician made a big hit with his song, "Worried Look," but his Dutch band was one of the most laughable things seen in Lodi for some time.

"The matinee girls furnished a pretty piece of work, and the young ladies responded to a very hearty encore.

"It remained for the soldier girls to make the hit of the evening in their fancy drill. This was one of the prettiest pieces of work ever seen in Lodi, and the way they went through their various evolutions would have done credit to Uncle Sam's regulars.

"Mrs. F.W. Beckman as the Baroness sang her song "Kisses" beautifully, and the pretty chorus back of her was very effective.

"Floyd Shank as Cook Johnston took his part well.

"The first act closed with "Sons of American Sires" sung by Miss Lottie LeMoine with a full chorus, with a tableau of Columbia for the grand finale, which took the house by storm.

"The second act was opened by Mr. Carlyle and chorus, with "I Want To Be A Military Man," which was well received. The Floradora sextette composed of Misses Watkins, McNeil and Tobriner with Messrs. Mellor, McLachlan and Shank made the hit of the evening and showed great attention to detail.

The Burlesque, on the Floradora, was a very clever skit by the Misses Ella and Nellie Corbin, and Messrs. Carlyle and Mellor.

Little Irine Cary sang "Little Tin Soldier," with the soldier girls, and her voice was clear and pretty.

Miss Nona Keeney sang a Japanese love song in costume, and responded to a hearty recall.

"A tramp skit by Carlyle and Mellor, had the house on the jump, and it is safe to say that the encores would have been coming yet had not the "Jemmies" monopolized the stage, and such a bunch of typical newspaper girls were never seen out of New York. They took the house by storm, and sent the audience home in roars of laugher.

"The Military Girl" will be repeated tonight, and those wishing to see the best show given here in years should not miss it. The following is a cast of characters:

A later view of the Opera House taken from Pine Street.

"General Bang, Jettora Watkins; Captain Bing, Neva McNeill; Cadet Cute Thing, Lottie LeMoin; Baroness, Mrs. F.W. Beckman; Sergt. Malone, A.N. Mellor; Cook Johnson, Floyd Shank; Fritz, a musician, Fred Carlyle; Columbia, Nettie Devon.

"Soldiers: Myrtle McClung, Gladys Graham, Larelda Graham, Edith Villinger, Birdie Beardsley, Christine Gerlach, Lottie LeMoin, Bessie Wilson, Nina Wilson, Maple Cook, Ora Anderson, Henrietta Emde.

"Matinee Girls and visitors: Mrs. A.V. Friedberger, Mrs. F.W. Beckman, Mrs. Fred Cary, Mrs. G.W. Hill, Mrs. A.H. Cook, Nellie Corbin, Ella Corbin, Hattie Tobriner, Nettie Devon, Inez Smith, Ida Gove, Clara Archer, L. Stevens, Ethel Thornton, Clara Williams, Amra Glenn, Lenora Keeney.

"Awkward Squad and Dutch Band: Francis McLachlan, Floyd Shank, Max Froehnert, Robt. Channell, Will Ryan.

"Perry Howe, as musical director, officiated at the piano to the complete satisfaction of the audience and those taking part in the production."

"New York State Folks," a pastoral play was presented to the Lodi theatre goers on the evening of October 17, 1905. "Sweet Clover," a comedy drama with Otis B. Thayer, Gertrude Bondhill and the original New York Company appeared October 10, 1905. On October 21, 1905, the talented Zoellner family of Stockton gave a concert here. The group consisted of Joseph Z; Antoinette, Amandus and Joseph Z., Jr.

J. Frank Fouche was scheduled to appear in Lodi on October 24, 1905 in a Shakespearean recital under the auspices of the Lodi High School to raise money for the annual athletic fund.

Bertha Creighton was in Lodi with a company of players on October 27, 1905. It was a performance which more than fulfilled expectations. Three short plays were presented, one of which she had written.

This lady had appeared previously in Lodi in 1904 in a play called "A Colonial Girl," before the opening of the Opera House.

From October 30 to November 4, 1905, the Hypnotist, Rosco, held forth at the local theatre together with the famous Millard Vaudeville Company and new vivid motion pictures. Admission was only 10¢ and 25¢.

"Buster Brown" with chorus, ballet and handsome settings, was slated for November 21, 1905. This show was based on the characterization of the then popular newspaper cartoon, "Buster Brown." In the stage performance his dog, "Tige" was played by an actor.

The W.J. Elleford Company was advertised to appear for two nights at the Opera House Dec. 4-5, 1905. The bill for the opening night was given as "The New Smith" with the second evening listed for "A Stranger in a Strange Land."

On the night of December 9, 1905 the play "Dora Thorne" was the theatre offering with Miss Cuba Nible in the title role. Raymond, the magician was advertised for Dec. 11, 12, 1905. The theatrical season at the Lodi Opera House appears to have closed Dec. 27, 1905 with Alvin Wyckoff in "Ten Nights in a Bar Room."

1906 was a busy year at the Lodi Opera House as is shown by the following list of productions and accompanying comments:

"Yon Yonson" at the local theatre with Earl K. Mitchell in the lead played at the Opera House on the evening of Jan. 15, 1906. It was afterwards reported that Mitchell didn't please the fair-sized audience which turned out to see the show. Previously, it seems that Ben Hendricks had appeared locally in the same part and it was noted by the newspaper that "Mitchell isn't in it — Hendricks could sing too." Also, during the second act the lights went out and the remainder of the performance had to be illuminated by a couple of smoky lamps.

A comedy, "Cousin Kate," played in Lodi January 20, 1906. Bertha Gallatin was the leading lady. On the evening of February 1, 1906, Mahara's Minstels played at the local Opera House. Louise Loston, spoken of as "America's Nightingale," received special notice for the great power, range and purity of her voice.

On February 10, 1906 there was a recital at the Opera House by the piano pupils of Miss Ella Jahant who resided near Woodbridge. This was followed on February 16, 1906 by a recital by Carrie Frose Snyder. This musicale was under the auspices of the Rathbone sisters.

On the evening of February 17, 1906 a lecture was given on Siberia by Count Alexander McLockwitsky. A farce comedy "Hans Hansen" appeared about this time with a band of 18 pieces. "My Wife's Family," a comedy, was slated for February 23, 1906.

Northland Singer, Ben Hendricks opened at the Opera House March 2, 1906 in "Ole Olson." Frederick Ward, noted Shakespearean actor, appeared in "Hamlet" on the evening of March 5, 1906.

In March of 1906, there were several productions at the Opera House. On the sixteenth, a play titled "At Cripple Creek" which depicted western frontiermen of the early '80's played at the theatre. On the following afternoon and evening "Ben Hur" was presented through the medium of colored photos. Professor Hair & Company of five opened at the Opera House for three evenings beginning March 20. Tests in hypnotism, magnetism and psychotism were advertised, also moving pictures.

A big ragtime reception and minstrel show took place at the Opera House March 30-31, 1906. This theatrical

LODI OPERA HOUSE

C. L. Van Buskirk, Owner Fred H. Lee, Manager

Thursday, May 18

The Richard J. Jose Grand Concert Co.

PROGRAMME

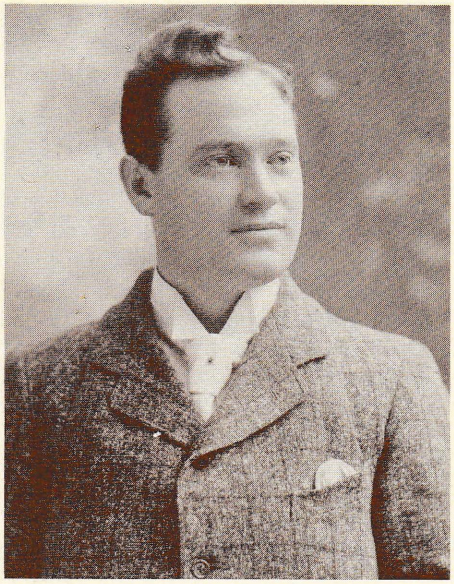
Under direction of C. Ernest Edwards.

1. String Quartet.
   a Adagio
   b Allegro quisi Presto, Op. No. 2 ..... Beethoven
   c Minuette ..... Bocherini
   Fuhrer Quartet.
2. Cello Solo
   a "Le Reve" ..... Goltermann
   b Evening Star (Tannhauser) ..... Wagner
   Miss Lucy J. Fuhrer.
3. Contra-Tenor Solo
   a "Rose of My Life" ..... Rose
   b "Too Late" ..... Rosey
   c "Glory to God ..... Dresser
   (Accompanied by Strings and Organ)
   Mr. Richard J. Jose.
4. String Quartet
   a "At the Seaside ..... Dumke
   b "In the Mill" ..... Gilelt
   c "Traumerei" ..... Schumann
   Fuhrer Quartet.

INTERMISSION.

5. Piano Solo.
   a Polonaise Militaire, A Major ..... Chopin
   b Minuette Celebre ..... Paderewski
   Mr. Uda Waldrop.
6. Contralto Solo
   a "Ave Maria" ..... Bach-Gounod
   Violin Obligato by Conrad W. Fuhrer.
   b "Afterwhile" ..... Richard J. Jose
   c "May Morning" ..... Denza
   Miss Ruth Estelle Weston.
7. Violin Solo
   22nd Concerto with celebrated cadenza ..... Violti
   Miss Bessie Rosamond Fuhrer.
8. Contra-Tenor Solo
   a "The Angel at the Window" ..... Tours
   b "Silver Threads Among the Gold"
   Violin Obligato by Conrad W. Fuhrer.
   Mr. Richard J. Jose.
9. String Quartet
   March Militaire. Transcribed for Quartet ..... Schubert
   Fuhrer Quartet.

Lodi Sentinel Print



Arthur Cunningham

Lillian Pleas Cunningham

presentation was under the auspices of the Lodi Native Daughters Lodge and was staged by Mrs. Runcie. Mrs. Theron Lillie presided at the piano. It was declared to be a clever show consisting of 60 local ladies in Vaudeville and minstrel act.

Leading lady among the girls was Mrs. L.C. McMurtry; Arathusa, Edith Bowling; Luna, Jennie Jahant. The merrymakers who had speaking parts included Mesdames Charles Newton, R. Sollars, A.J. Cook, Jno. Beardsley and the Misses Nina and Bessie Wilson, Nona Keeny, Lucille Taylor, Nellie Corbin, also Misses Bulock and Archer.

Soloists participating were Miss Eva Beckman and Marie Murray. A mandolin and guitar duet was given by the Misses Maizie and Lucille Taylor. Among many others who took part in the production were the Misses Larelda Graham, Barkis, Pansy Minor and Hattie Tobriner.

Bioscope moving pictures were shown at the Opera House April 4 and 5, 1906. The pictures were claimed to be clear and the show lasted over two hours. On April 6, Beeson Brothers staged "Uncle Tom's Cabin." It was preceded by a street parade.

The light opera, "Erminie" was presented to the Lodi public in the middle of April 1906 by the Abbott and Bryant Company. The cast numbered 15 with 20 in the chorus. James Francis Abbott was the tenor lead with Miss Blanche Bryant as leading soprano and Edna Earl, contralto.

On the evening of April 19, 1906, Cyrus Brownlee Newton was at the local theatre. In addition Bert William and Warren Lucy of the Knicobocker Quartette took part. "Chick" was put on at the Opera House April 27 by the Lodi Dramatic Club.

On April 18, 1906 came the catastrophic earthquake and fire in San Francisco. Complete disorder prevailed as refugees sought shelter from the searing flames that destroyed the major sections of that great city. Among those refugees were this writer's aunt and uncle, Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Cunningham.

At this time, Arthur Cunningham was the star of the Tivoli Opera House in San Francisco and his wife, Lillian Pleas Cunningham also a member of the company. The following quotes are from a piece in the Lodi Sentinel which in turn had been copied from the San Jose Evening News:

"Arthur Cunningham, a member of the opera company at the San Francisco Tivoli, was in town today. He said, "I was in a building on Eddy Street when the quake came. With my wife, I hurried to the street as there was a lot of plaster and brick falling inside.

"One young man who had been living in the building said he'd go back and get his things, that he was not afraid. The elevator was not running. He walked to the fourth floor then came another quake and he came out of the building like a shot. The last I saw of him he was headed for the park with a handkerchief over his head.

"My wife and I slept in the park the first night. Then we went to Oakland and from there my wife went to Lodi where she has relatives. I remained to see if I could get anything from the ruins.

"The building in which we lived was destroyed by fire. When I succeeded in getting to the place, after securing a pass from the Governor, there was nothing but a mass of ashes. A peculiar thing about the fire that followed the quake was that everything burned to ashes. You see very little charred wood among the ruins.

"I went to the site of the Tivoli. I had two trunks in my dressing room at the theatre. As soon as I saw the ruins, I knew that there was not a chance in a hundred of getting any valuables out.

"I went to Paso Robles and stayed a few days with friends. I am now on my way to Lodi to join my wife. I shall not do anything for the next few months. The theatrical season in the East has closed and will not open until September. Fortunately, I have an engagement for next season in the East so I am all right after September.

"I had a hundred and eight dollars in my pocket when I got out of my rooms. I was going to pay a life insurance the following day, that's how I happened to have it. The premium will have to wait awhile. I will get an extension of time. I have some money in a bank in San Francisco which is safe.

"I am going to Lodi and may spend a few months there — all I saved from the fire was the clothes I wear and this hat which is the vintage of 1886. I grabbed the first hat within reach from a dark closet. I have no overcoat. But you don't need overcoats in this country."

Arthur Cunningham did, indeed, come to Lodi and while here he appeared at the Lodi Opera House for the benefit of the San Francisco Relief Fund. The Lodi newspapers wrote enthusiastically of the performance which took place in May of 1906:

"No better entertainment in Lodi was ever given nor a more worthy cause served. It was, besides, a genuinely pleasant surprise to the large and appreciative audience assembled.

The local talent, too, was exceptionally good and seldom appeared to better advantage.

"Among the local vocal numbers, the efforts of Miss Eva Beckman were clearly the gems of the evening. She is the possessor of a rich, sweet, full voice, and musical critics who heard Miss Beckman Monday evening predict for her a most promising future.

"The readings of Miss Jennie Jahant and Miss Cockrell were so well received they were compelled to bow themselves out of repeated encores. Miss Jahant's humorous reading, "Encouragement" simply captivated the audience.

"The piano solo, "Impromptu" by Schubert, performed by Miss Lizzie Keller, a pupil of Miss Ella Jahant, and again the instrumental duet, "Midsummer Night's Dream" by Miss Jahant and Miss Keller were pleasing numbers, executed with expression and giving a critical interpretation of difficult selections.

Miss May Ferrel's vocal solo, "When You Are Near, Love," and her "Ave Maria" with encores, were enjoyable numbers. Miss Ferrell possesses a rich contralto that shows much culture. (Miss Ferrel was a San Francisco musician who was visiting in Lodi at the time.)

"The selection by the ladies quartette, the Misses Lottie LeMoin, Eva Beckman, May Ferrel and Mrs. Frank W. Beckman, was full of merit. The quartette of voices blended in sweet harmony and were among the most pleasing numbers.

The vocal solos by Miss Rebecca Del Valle were among the gems. It was not her first appearance before a Lodi audience, having sung at a musicale some time ago. Her reputation as one of San Francisco's cultured vocalists was fully sustained. She sings with marked expression and her tones are clear, brilliant and sweet.

"The fancy dancing by little Misses Oleta Myer and Marie Murray were unique and graceful efforts, both little ladies responding to hearty encores.

"The singing of Mr. Arthur G. Cunningham, a member of the Tivoli Opera Company was alone worth ten times the price of admission. It was a vocal treat that seldom falls to the lot of a community of Lodi's dimensions. The talented baritone, however, has the satisfaction of knowing that his efforts were highly appreciated by local lovers of good singing, and that fact, of course, has in a great measure compensated him for the loss by fire and a few months' Tivoli salary thrown in. Mr. Cunningham is not alone the possessor of a magnificent voice, concerning which San Francisco's musical critics have sung their highest praise, but he also possesses to a marked degree those genial, pleasant social graces of refinement that have made him a pronounced favorite both on and off the stage. His solo was "The Two Grenadiers" by Schumann, and for an encore he sang, "The Skipper" by Judge, and for a re-encore repeated part of "The Skipper."

Note the number of stars in the U.S. flag in this early view of the Opera House.

"Mrs. Del Valle as accompanist, has been highly complimented for her efficient work, as was also Miss Jahant's perfect playing at sight of Mr. Cunningham's accompaniments."

After the great disaster in San Francisco, Arthur Cunningham was before the public for many years charming his audiences with his dramatic voice. He appeared in numerous productions in New York City and, in fact, in all the large cities of the United States. He was especially famed for his acting and vocal interpretations of the Gilbert and Sullivan opera roles. It has been said that he had memorized the complete scores of these operas, a tremendous feat in itself.

Arthur Cunningham was not only connected to Lodi history through his appearance at the Lodi Opera House but also because he chose a Lodi girl to become his wife. He married Lillian Pleas while they were both appearing in light operas at the Tivoli Opera House.

Lillian Pleas, sister of Mrs. G.W. Hill and Miss Daisy M. Pleas of Lodi, was the daughter of the pioneers Mr. and Mrs. Silas Pleas who resided just north of the Mokelumne River on the 99 highway. Before leaving Lodi she appeared at numerous entertainments in her hometown. At an early age she studied voice with Mrs. Oullahan of Stockton, and from there she went to San Francisco where she was engaged as a member of the Tivoli Opera Company. In the early 1900's she was considered one of the Tivoli's most beautiful women and her picture was often seen in San Francisco newspapers and in the theatrical magazines of this country.

Lillian was buried in the Woodbridge Cemetery along with the ashes of Arthur Cunningham. Her second husband, Clarence Rees, was also buried nearby at his request.

Following Mr. Cunningham's appearance, other presentations at the Lodi Opera House in 1906 included "Nevada, or The Lost Mine" on June 9. On September 29 the Electric Wonderland and Moving Picture Com-

pany were slated.

James N. Gillett, candidate for governor of California gave a political speech at the Opera House October 8, 1906. A great crowd awaited his arrival which was delayed by automobile trouble en route to Lodi.

A benefit concert by Master Alfred Troemel, boy violinist, was given on October 10. The concert was for the purpose of raising money for the young violinist's musical education. Mrs. Theron R. Lillie acted as accompanist. Miss Eva Beckman was heard in vocal numbers, Miss Jennie Jahant gave a reading while Miss Lizzie Keller was the piano soloist.

On October 16, the Rajaero Company appeared in the play "Reaping the Harvest." A program by the musical Zoellner family of Stockton gave a grand concert at the Opera House October 14, 1906. A newspaper writer commented that the concert was poorly attended there being "a slim house indicative of Lodi's taste." The critic goes on to praise the musicale as "the best ever given in Lodi." The program lasted for two hours of wonderful music in which the music lovers of Lodi "held high carnival."

The annual Catholic Fair took place at the Opera House on the evenings of November 1-3, in 1906. Booths and programs were changed nightly and there was dancing and refreshments.

The play "Tillie Olson" was billed for November 6. "The Holy City" was presented on the evening of November 13, with Luella Morey as Salome. The production claimed to be superbly mounted and correctly costumed and supported by a strong company. It was reviewed later as "a masterpiece" and one of the best productions ever seen in Lodi.

"The Marriage of Kitty" took place at the local show house on November 22, 1906. Florence Gear had the lead in this comedy. Beach and Bowers Minstrels made up entirely of white personnel were advertised to appear at the Opera House on Saturday evening December 1, 1906. There was also to be a free open air concert in front of the theatre.

The final bill of fare for 1906 was the Shakespearean play "The Taming of the Shrew" on the evening of December 19.

Charles L. Van Buskirk
Photo by Marilyn Van Buskirk Moore

Below: The Van Buskirk mansion once graced north Church Street. As with many of Lodi's historic homes, it was torn down in the name of progress.

The Lodi Historian
is a quarterly publication
of the Lodi Historical Society
P.O. Box 264, Lodi, CA 95241-0264

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